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PRIMITIVE MAN
Quarterly Bulletin
of the
Catholic Anthropological Conference

Vol. XIV | January and April, 1961 | Nos. 1 and 2

ASPECTS OF THE AVUNCULATE IN THE GUAJIRO CULTURE

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THE Guajira peninsula is situated in the northwest corner of Colombia, South America, roughly between the 71° and 73° W. long., and 11° and 12° N. lat. It is rather flat in contour with only some hill ranges in the eastern part. Rainfall is scarce and the vegetation is of a semi-arid type. The region is inhabited by one tribe of Indians, the Arawak-speaking Guajiro. Both culturally and linguistically the Guajira peninsula presents a uniform block.

The present writer visited the territory in the summer of 1960, but due to illness contracted there was forced to cut short his visit. Fairly full data were gathered on all phases of social culture. The present paper deals with certain aspects of one phase only, the avunculate.

The role of the maternal uncle is manifold in Guajiro culture, organized as the Guajiro are into maternal clan. Types of behavior, both prescribed and unformulated, vary, depending on the seniority of both uncle and nephew, but not on that of niece. In this paper we shall be concerned for the most part with the prescribed and voluntary relations between the eldest brother of a given woman and her eldest son, and between this eldest brother and his sisters' daughters. Other relations not involving these specified kin will be touched upon only incidentally for illustrative purposes.

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Reciprocal Relations of Maternal Uncle and Nephew

609 The general attitude of the maternal uncle toward his nephew is one of giving; and that of the nephew, one of receiving.

429 Let us first deal with inheritance. Theoretically, the rule
609 is that the maternal uncle must leave all of his property, both
183 personal and in the form of cattle, to his eldest sister's eldest son.
431 All his other nephews,—other sons of the same sister or sons of other sisters,—are left out of the inheritance. This is the rule. However, in practice it seldom works, as the maternal uncle during his life continues to transfer his property in the form of gifts to his own male children, so that at the time of his death there is nothing, or very little, left of his property to be inherited by his nephew, unless the uncle is a very rich man. Only among the wealthy class has the uncle always something left to bequeath to his nephew. For this he does not need a will as it falls within the prescribed rule mentioned above. The following cases are illustrative.

938 Ilaro is the eldest son of a man named Rafael Iriag at Uribia,
931 and, like his mother, belongs to the Arpushana eh. Ilaro's
609 mother is the elder of the two sisters of Cailoja, who in turn is the eldest of five siblings,—two sisters and three brothers. Thus Ilaro, his mother, and his uncle Cailoja are all uraiuu. Cailoja is not looked upon as a rich man, although he is well (64) fixed and belongs to the middle class. Ilaro, however, does not expect much, if any, inheritance from his uncle and is aware (70) that the latter has been transferring most of his cattle,—the most valuable possession in Goajiro eyes,—in the form of gifts to his own sons. The writer visited Ilaro's uncle who lives (93) nearby and saw the cattle already branded with his son's personal brand. Ilaro is not at all concerned about the property of his other uncles as their property will pass automatically to their own children.

This next case illustrates a different situation. Pushana is a very rich man who lives in Carraipia. He has a nephew,—the senior maternal nephew,—who lives there also. Pushana has a son of his own and the present writer observed that many of Pushana's cattle have already been branded for his son, but

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as his herds are large there are quite a number still unbranded. Perkens informed me that at the time of his death, those left unbranded will automatically—following the inheritance rule—go to his nephew.

The attitudes of these two nephews, Dave on one hand, and Pare, Perkens's nephew, on the other, are quite different. Dave has very little to do with his uncle. He seldom visits him, although they live quite near each other, and their relations are somewhat detached. However, there is no animosity between Dave and the writer noticed that they speak of each other, not badly, but with indifference. In the case of Perkens and his nephew the relationship is very close. They pay each other visits with regularity, and Perkens shows a paternalistic attitude toward his nephew and is always willing to help him in every way possible. On the other hand Pare never shows any hesitation in going to his uncle for whatever he needs regardless of whether his uncle is able to help him or not.

Perkens has other nephews, brothers of Pare and others, but he has practically no relations with them. They never go to him for any assistance and he does not expect them to do so. Regarding inheritance they, of course, receive nothing whatever from Perkens at his death.

It appears that generally the attitude of a senior nephew toward his senior maternal uncle largely depends on what he expects from him in the way of inheritance. There are cases, however, where mutual understanding and regard and affection are strong, irregardless of what the nephew expects. Such is the following case. Candido is the only son of a poor man living at Cordon. He has a senior maternal uncle living at Manaure who is also poor. Although living at quite a distance, Candido often goes to pay a visit to his uncle, and is often visited by him. Candido shows great respect toward his uncle and speaks of him as being a very good man, who would do anything for him if he could, but he is aware that his uncle can do very little for him. The writer visited the uncle at Manaure and verified the impression of him given by Candido. He holds his nephew in high regard, is very much concerned in all that Candido does and in how he is getting along in life.

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604 Regarding the marriage of the senior nephew, the maternal
587 uncle plays no prescribed part, unless the prospective bride comes from a very wealthy family and consequently the bride price is quite high. In such cases the uncle is expected to help
(583) with a small donation to meet the price. Although this is expected from him he has no say whatsoever in the selection of the bride. The bride price in its entirety, or certainly in major part, is paid by the father of the bridegroom. The influence of the uncle, even if he has happened to help pay part of the bride price, is practically zero. This is the rule, but naturally in-
(583) dividual deviations from it are found. The case of Camilo is again illustrative of this. Although he is not contemplating marriage for the present, Camilo told the present writer that once he had made up his mind to get married he would go to his uncle for advice. No other such cases came to the attention of the writer, but speaking with other informants on this subject he was invariably told that such cases do often occur and that they are not out of the ordinary. However, this is not prescribed behavior and arises only from personal regard or affection.

604 There is a prescribed pattern of conduct that both the senior maternal uncle and his senior nephew must observe when in each other's company, regardless of what personal sentiments they have for each other. If there are other people around the nephew must always keep silence if his uncle is speaking and if the nephew wants to say something he must first ask permission of his uncle. This permission is asked by the nephew rising from his seat or, if he is already standing, by tapping his uncle on the arm. The uncle is at complete liberty to grant or refuse the permission; however, a refusal was never witnessed by the present writer. In all ways the nephew must show respect and conduct himself with propriety. If he, in any way, should fail
604 626 to conform, he would be severely criticized, not only by his uncle but also by the rest of the company, whether they were relatives or not. On the other hand, the uncle must not laugh at his nephew,—although he may laugh with him,—and if his nephew says something wrong he must correct him in such a way that his nephew would not feel hurt. Should the uncle do otherwise he would be subjected to criticism, not by his nephew, but by the rest of the company.

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The foregoing behavior pattern applies only in regard to a senior maternal uncle and his senior nephew. No such behavior is prescribed between father and son, nor between other uncles and nephews. There is no prescribed rule that either the father or the son must show respect for the other. They would not apparently be subjected to any public criticism at all should they be disrespectful, but in all cases where the present writer had occasion to see father and son together, there were always indications of respect to each other, especially by the son toward his father. That this behavior is not prescribed and that it is the result of regard or other factors is clear from the fact that the present writer was informed on several occasions while investigating this subject that there are cases in which father and son who lack affection to each other would quarrel, even in public, without being criticized. The writer, however, did not personally witness any such cases. The same can be said regarding the conduct between an individual and his uncles other than his senior paternal uncle. Signs of respect are shown all along the line but this is not a prescribed rule. All information gathered on the subject by the writer points to the conclusion that the above pattern of conduct is prescribed between only senior maternal uncle and senior nephew; signs of respect toward the father or the other uncles are apparently shown only out of mutual affection or other personal motives. Public opinion censures any breach in the first case, while it disregards or is indifferent to any breach in the several cases.

The following illustrative case throws some light on the situation. During one of the sessions held with Rafael, his son Ilario was present and shortly afterward we were joined by Ilario's senior maternal uncle. The moment the uncle stepped into the hut, Ilario got up from his place and did not resume it until his uncle was well seated. All during the conversation prior to the coming of the uncle, Ilario had been putting in remarks to the questions asked of his father and the latter did not seem to mind. After the uncle came in, although Ilario's attention to what was going on did not falter, he restrained himself from making any further remarks and let his uncle make them instead. Only once did Ilario make a remark, and this was only after

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having asked the permission of his uncle, and when he had finished he asked his uncle's opinion on the subject, something he had not asked of his father prior to his uncle's arrival. In every way Ilaro showed respect toward his uncle, although as has been previously pointed out, contacts between the two are neither close nor numerous. At one time the uncle made a remark which apparently was not in agreement with Ilaro's opinion. However, Ilaro did not speak until his uncle was gone, which was a good two hours later. Ilaro remembered the remark, however, and reverting to it, gave his opinion, asking the present writer not to mentioned it to his uncle. The matter was of little importance, having to do with the proper selection of a length for the manufacture of a bow. A breach of this prescribed pattern of behavior would have brought public criticism, and the guilty party would have had no excuse.

As regards the behavior between an individual and all his other uncles, data were secured on various occasions. One illustration will suffice. It again concerns Ilaro. The day before his departure the writer was given a feast by Rafael, to which the latter invited nearly all of his relatives by blood and by marriage who could come. Consequently there was plenty of opportunity to observe the behavior of Ilaro toward his uncles. Toward Cailoja, Ilaro's behavior was exactly the same as on the occasion described above. Toward his other uncles a certain deference was shown, but not nearly so much as toward Cailoja. For example, Ilaro showed no hesitation in interrupting his other uncles' speech, which he did on various occasions. This gave rise to no criticism of him.

So far we have been dealing with the behavior in public between the senior nephew and his senior maternal uncle. Naturally no such observation was possible in regard to the private relations between the two, that is, when nephew and uncle are together by themselves. However, judging from what information could be obtained, it appears that the behavior of the nephew in private is very much the same as in public. If he expects inheritance from his uncle, because were he to depart from the conventional, the uncle would disinherit him. On the other hand, if the nephew expects no such inheritance, and the uncle is thus

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unable to punish his nephew by disinheriting him, the nephew's behavior is very much dictated by the ties of regard or affection that exist or are lacking between the two. The private behavior of the uncle toward his nephew is almost wholly controlled by the same ties, as there would be no way for the nephew to retaliate if his uncle were to break the rule. There is one control, however, that both the nephew and the uncle have over each other. It has nothing to do with either regard or affection or with the possibility of inheritance. It is the fear that if either the nephew or the uncle break the rule the offended one may circulate the news in the community. If such news were circulated the reaction of the community would depend on the standing in the community of both parties concerned. If, for example, the offended had good standing while the offender had not, the reaction would be highly condemnatory. In the reverse situation, the news would be taken lightly.

From the evidence gathered, three primary factors condition the actual attitudes and behavior of a senior nephew and his senior maternal uncle. The first is the economic interest that the nephew may have in his uncle's property. The second is the fear of public opinion. The economic factor may or may not be operative; the fear of public opinion is always present. The third factor is regard or affection or similar personal sentiments. These three factors may go hand in hand and then it is very difficult to say which is the strongest. In some cases, as in that of Camilo and his uncle, mutual affection and regard are undoubtedly the dominant factor.

To sum up: when the senior maternal uncle is rich, he is the giver, and the senior nephew the receiver, of benefits. As to actual behavior, however, a nephew is obliged to show deference in a particular manner to his senior maternal uncle, and the uncle in turn must show a certain amount of respect for his nephew. Fear of public opinion makes for conformity in behavior regardless of economic interest or personal regard.

Reciprocal Relations of Maternal Uncle and Niece

The relationship here is just the reverse of the uncle-nephew relationship. Here the uncle is the receiver of the benefits and

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604 the niece the giver. Another difference is that while the giving-receiving relation in the uncle-nephew situation is between the senior nephew and his senior maternal uncle, in the uncle-niece situation it is between the senior maternal uncle and all the daughters of all his sisters.

In the senior maternal uncle-niece relationship the whole [929] question of inheritance is out of the picture, as in Guajiro culture the woman, regardless of her status, cannot inherit. The nieces never expect and never get anything from any of their uncles in the way of inheritance or otherwise. Consequently we can eliminate economic expectations on the part of the niece as a motivating factor. Their behavior toward their senior maternal uncle is the resultant of other factors. The senior maternal uncle being on his part the receiver of benefits may act from affection or regard, or from selfish or other motives, or combinations thereof.

604 The senior maternal uncle receives material profits from all 583 of his sisters' daughters through the bride price. The bride price, however big or small, must be paid to the senior maternal uncle of the bride, while he on the other hand does not contribute anything toward the dowry which the bride must present to the bridegroom. The bride price must always be paid in cattle, while the dowry usually consists of gifts of clothing, household goods, hammocks, etc. Consequently the senior maternal uncle is very much interested in the marriage of his nieces and sees that they marry advantageously. He may accept or reject [584] a prospective bridegroom at will, and the girl has to conform [193] and to say nothing in the matter. This is the theory and to a great extent the practice, although there are cases in which the uncle has given in on the insistence of the niece or of the prospective bridegroom or of both, and a few cases of elopement have also come to the notice of the present writer. As previously mentioned, all of this concerns only the senior maternal uncle and all the daughters of all his sisters: the other uncles, maternal or other, have no say in the matter.

604 The following cases will serve as illustrations. Estrella is 584 the daughter of Ramoncito's oldest sister. They all belong to the wealthy class. She is now of marriageable age—about 15

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or 16 years old—and it is entirely up to Ramoncito to find a suitable mate for her. As yet there is no prospective bridegroom but when he is found he will be entirely Ramoncito's choice. Ramoncito may seek the advice of Estrella's parents, but the final say rests with him. Even the girl has little or nothing to do with the selection. Ramoncito will settle the bride price and collect it all for himself. He will not share it with his other brothers nor will the girl's parents receive any part of it. Ramoncito concerns himself greatly about Estrella and seldom lets a day pass without paying her a visit. Estrella comes to visit her uncle quite frequently too, either alone—for they live close by—or with her mother, and she always brings a little gift for Ramoncito's only child. Ramoncito has another sister whose daughter is already married. In this case it was Ramoncito again who made all the arrangements for the marriage, selecting a wealthy bridegroom, settling the bride price, and collecting it. He kept all of it for himself as he is supposed to do. None of the other relatives had anything to say regarding the marriage.

The following is another case, one from a different level of society. Carmelina is the daughter of a poor man who lives at San Antonio. She has only one maternal uncle, who is also poor. About a year ago her uncle insisted upon her marrying the bridegroom whom he had already selected for her. The bride price was arranged and collected by her uncle, but he being a wasteful man—according to Carmelina—went to Venezuela, sold the cattle there and spent all of his money. Since that time this uncle has been trying to get some cattle from Carmelina's husband, but, as he has no further claim on his niece, they have refused him. Carmelina, apparently is happy in her marriage and glad to be out of her uncle's reach. He pays frequent visits to his niece, but as he is received with cool indifference his visits are less frequent than they used to be.

Now for the actual pattern of behavior. The present writer was able to observe personally the mode of behavior between Estrella and Ramoncito and between Carmelina and her uncle. Let us take Estrella's case first. Apart from the fact that in the Guajira whenever we find a mixed group the women in-

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[562] variably stay somewhat in the background, the attitude of 604 Estrella in the presence of her uncle is not marked by that stiff formality so obvious in the attitude of Ilaro and his uncle. She shows no signs of disrespect, but on the other hand she is perfectly free to interrupt her uncle whenever she feels like doing so and nobody can criticise her. This she does not do frequently, but during the course of the conversation which the present writer observed she interrupted him twice with no apparent annoyance or disapproval on the part of Ramonelin. His attitude toward her was very much the same. Respect is shown by both, but that marked formality that is so apparent in the uncle-nephew relations is lacking. This may possibly be due to the fact that the nephew is of course the receiver of benefits — theoretically at least — and consequently must show great respect in the way of a stiff formality in order not to anger his uncle, while in the other case the uncle receives benefits through his niece, and although she cannot override her uncle altogether [563] because of the general backwardness of women in the Guajira, rigid formality, at least, is absent. This interpretation was checked up with the native informants, to discover if possible their own views. The matter was found to be far from clear in their minds, but they were all of the opinion that the above economic considerations, may be a factor in explaining the presence of the rigid formality in one case and its absence in the other.

In the case of Carmelina the situation is somewhat different. Although there were no outward signs of disrespect shown by either Carmelina or her uncle, there was no sign at all of affection between them, especially on the part of Carmelina. She treated her uncle very coldly, seldom addressed him and paid little attention to what he said. The writer had been working with Carmelina and her husband all one morning and was to stay that day and night with them. Around midmorning the uncle [574] joined the group but was not invited to stay for dinner, although on several occasions he tried to get himself invited. After he left both Carmelina and her husband spoke sharply about her uncle. The writer was unfortunately unable to contact the uncle and get his opinion on the matter. Nevertheless, it is apparently safe to conclude that while the relations between

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Estrella and her uncle may be controlled somewhat by personal regard and affection, such appear not to exist in the relations between Carmelina and her uncle. 604

The behavior of the senior maternal uncle is uniformly the same toward all of his nieces so far as the prescribed conduct is concerned, although he may not personally feel exactly the same toward every one of them due to individual difference in character and personality.

The behavior described so far has been that of the uncle and niece in public. As to the private relations between them, the present writer was informed that the relations were no different in private than in public.

Cases in which the niece goes against her uncle's will in marriage and elopes are very infrequent in the Guajira. When they occur they are severely criticized and the girl gets the reputation of being loose. Public opinion is so strong that in all the cases except one, which came to the attention of the present writer, the couple has had to move to another community away from both her family and his. The case in which the uncle has at first been opposed to the marriage but finally consents on the insistence of the couple falls into a different category. Such a couple is not criticised and may live without fear in the community. 583 584 604 626

Summary

As regards the senior maternal uncle and senior nephew relationship: first, the nephew, at least theoretically, is the recipient of benefits, and conducts himself with extreme propriety. Regardless of the regard or affection, he may or may not have for his uncle, he behaves according to rule lest public opinion turn against him and curtail his chances for trade, marriage, etc. Toward his other uncles, there seems to be no prescribed pattern and he may behave toward them as he pleases. Second, the attitude of the uncle toward his nephew is again largely controlled by public opinion. It is true that he does not have to show such marked formality as his nephew shows toward him, but on the other hand he must do nothing detrimental to the character or respect-status of the nephew. His behavior toward 604

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his other nephews is largely controlled by the degree of regard or affection that he has toward them individually.

As regards relations between the senior maternal uncle and his nieces, first, the uncle is the recipient of benefits derived from his nieces, largely in the form of the bride price, and he takes care to make a show of regard and concern for all of his nieces. Naturally, this does not imply that real affection or regard is non-existent. Second, the attitudes of the nieces toward their senior maternal uncle, although not so rigidly formal, are, nevertheless, respectful and considerate. Toward their other uncles, degree of regard or lack of it seems to be the only factor that controls the behavior.

We appear to be on safe ground in concluding that in the relations between a senior maternal uncle and his senior nephew, public opinion is the dominant factor making for conformity with the behavior code. To this we may add regard, affection or other factors according to individual differences. The behavior between other uncles and nephews is largely controlled by personal regard or the lack of it.

In the relations between the senior maternal uncle and his nieces again we find that public opinion is the controlling element, with regard as an additional factor in individual cases. All other relations between other uncles and nephews are controlled seemingly by regard, affection and similar personal motivations.

Goajiro Terms of Relationship

We are appending here, not all Goajiro relationship terms, but only those that are directly or indirectly involved in the avunculate complex.

father	*tuti*
mother	*ti*
senior son	*tuta-ulutsi-tira*
senior daughter	*tuta-ulutsi-irha*
other sons	*tuta-tira*
other daughters	*tuta-irha*
senior maternal uncle	*tirsula-ulutsi-ti*
senior maternal aunt	*iti-ulutsi-ti*

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other maternal uncle	tiiwudu-ñoi
other maternal aunt	tiñi-ñoi
paternal uncle	tiiro-ñori
paternal aunt	tiñi-ñori
senior maternal nephew	tiwipá-ulachi-tsudru-iñu
senior maternal niece	tsuru-tsudru-iñu
other maternal nephew	tiwipá-tsudru-iñu
other maternal niece	tsuru-tsudru-iñu
paternal nephew	tiwipá-tiru
paternal niece	tsuru-iñu